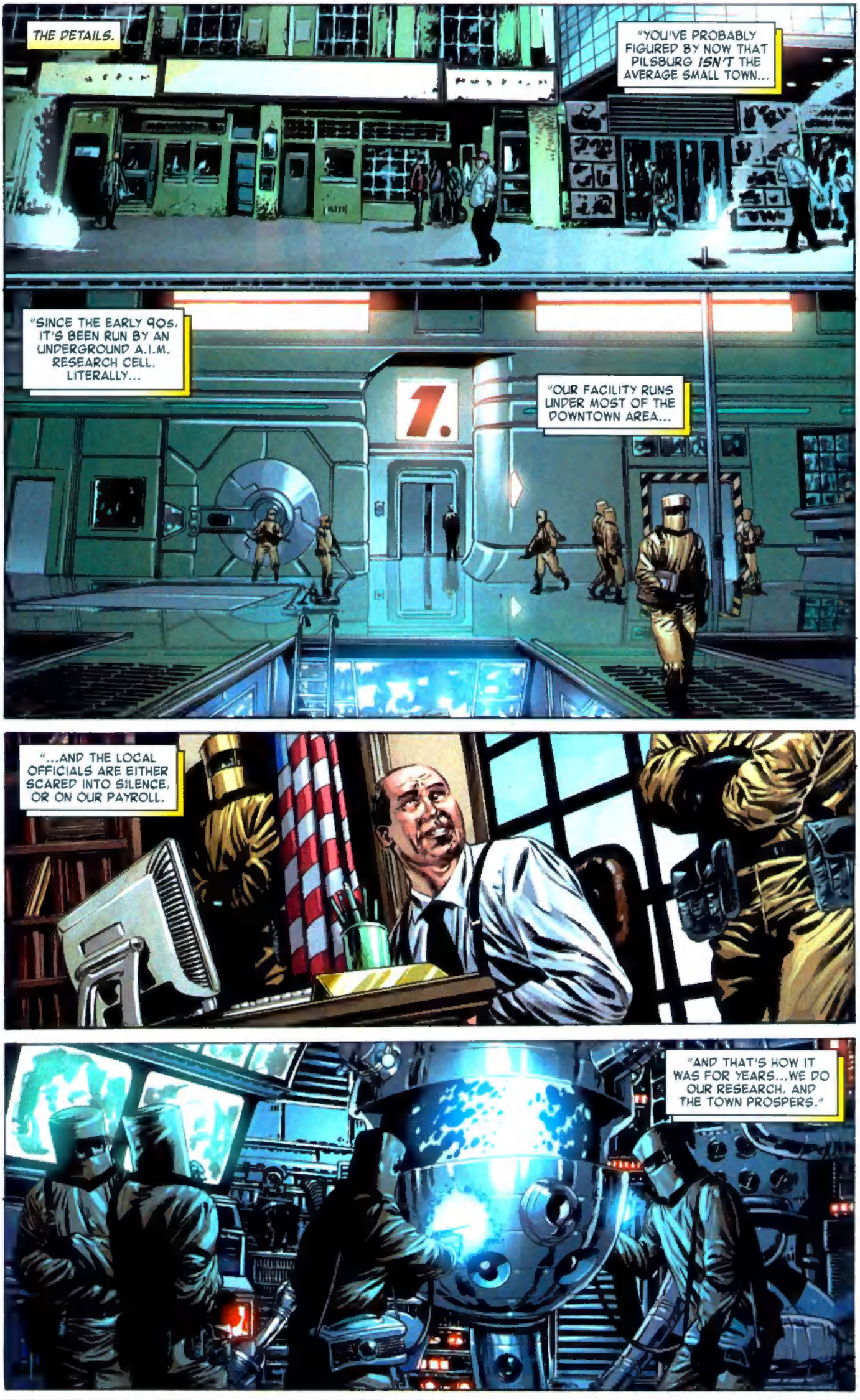

THE DETAILS.
"YOU'VE PROBABLY FIGURED BY NOW THAT PILSBURG *ISN'T* THE AVERAGE SMALL TOWN...
"SINCE THE EARLY 90s, IT'S BEEN RUN BY AN UNDERGROUND A.I.M. RESEARCH CELL. LITERALLY...
"OUR FACILITY RUNS UNDER MOST OF THE DOWNTOWN AREA...
"...AND THE LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE EITHER SCARED INTO SILENCE, OR ON OUR PAYROLL.
"AND THAT'S HOW IT WAS FOR YEARS...WE DO OUR RESEARCH, AND THE TOWN PROSPERS."

BUT THEN LAST WEEK, SOME SUPER-AGENT BROKE INTO OUR LAB.
HE DESTROYED SEVERAL KEY PROTOTYPES, AS WELL AS TAKING OUT ONE OF OUR BUILDINGS IN TOWN.
IT'S ALL BEEN GOING TO HELL SINCE JUST BEFORE THE RED SKULL GOT KILLED.
VARIOUS BRANCHES OF A.I.M. BREAKING OFF AND TAKING OUR RESEARCH WITH THEM.
AND HOW DOES THIS LEAD TO CROSSBONES TAKING OVER YOUR LAB, EXACTLY?
ONE OF OUR FIELD AGENTS WAS FOLLOWING HIM, WAITING FOR HIM TO CONTACT THE GROUP THAT NOW CALLS ITSELF R.A.I.D.
RADICALLY ADVANCED IDEAS IN DESTRUCTION.
APPARENTLY, OUR AGENT'S COVER GOT BLOWN...WELL, I'M ASSUMING...
BECAUSE ALL I KNOW IS--

WELL, WHAT DID I TELL YOU?
DID I DISAGREE? IT'S A GOOD PLAN.

JUST DON'T YOU GO GETTIN' HUNG UP ON CAPTAIN AMERICA...
WE'RE HERE FOR A REASON. REMEMBER THAT.

OH, I'LL REMEMBER... JUST DON'T STOP ME FROM HAVING MY FUN.
IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?
NO.

YOU IDIOTS KNOW WHAT TO DO?
YES SIR.
THEN GET TO IT.

YOU'RE ABOUT TO BE INVADED BY S.H.I.E.L.D.
LET'S MAKE IT LOOK GOOD.

YOU WANNA GO OVER THIS ONCE MORE?
WE GO THROUGH THIS DOOR, THEN WE SHOULD BE SAFE UNTIL THE NEXT DOOR, ABOUT FORTY FEET DOWN...
THAT ONE OPENS INTO THE MAIN COMPLEX.
OKAY, THEN ONCE YOU GET THIS DOOR OPEN, TWO OF MY MEN WILL TAKE YOU TO A HOLDING CELL ON OUR HOVERCRAFT.
OH... UH...I WAS HOPING--
BLAM
LOOK OUT!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
MOVE, PEOPLE! NOW!
GO! GO! GO!
RATATATATATATATATATAT

THEY LET HIM COME OUT AND FIND US...
YEAH. THEY SET HIM AND HIS FRIENDS UP...I SHOULD'VE SEEN IT.
I SHOULD'VE, TOO.
WELL...KEEP SAFE.
YOU, TOO.
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
GET THEM, YOU SONS OF %#$@*@!
BLANNG
KA-TANNG
WHOA.

HOLD THEM AS LONG AS YOU CAN. THEN RETREAT DOWN BOTH SIDES HERE, TO DIVIDE THEM.
YOU'RE LEAVING?
GOTTA MAKE SURE SIN'S ON TARGET.
BLAM BLAM
RATATATATATATATATATATAT
JUST MAKE THEM WORK, IDIOT.
IT TAKES A MOMENT FOR THEM TO BOOT UP, I'M NOT--
TOO MUCH TALKING.
UK--
BLAM
MODOC SQUAD ACTIVATED... HOSTILE TARGET ENGAGED.
HOSTILE--?
OH DAMN...
BLAM BLAM
SUBDUE HOSTILE TARGET-- PROTECT A.I.M.

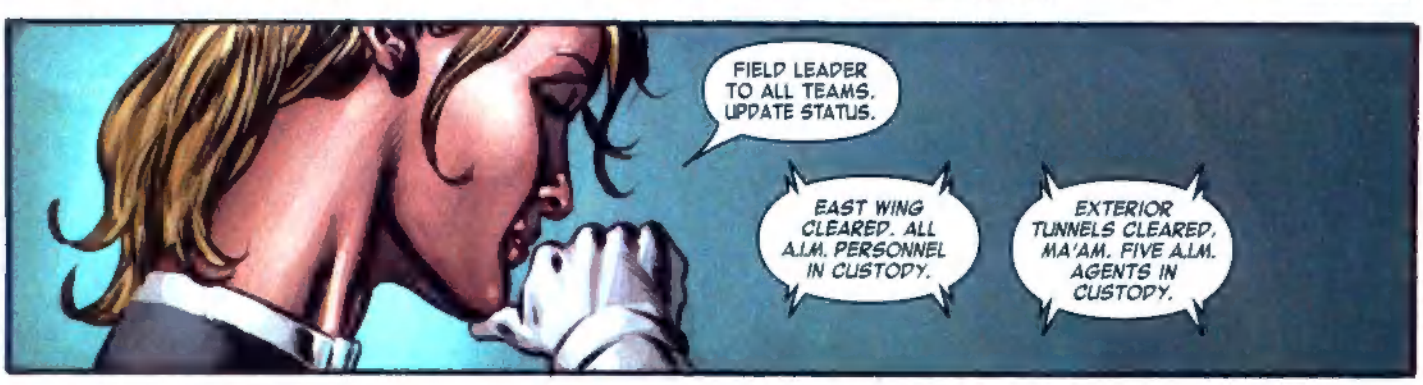
BROCK!
HELP!
BLAM BLAM
DAMN, GIRL... WHAT'D YOU DO?
I GOT IMPATIENT WITH ONE OF THE YELLOW SUITS!
BLAM BLAM
YOU AND THAT ITCHY TRIGGER-FINGER...
KA-BLAM
THEY'RE COMING! THEY'RE RIGHT BEHIND US!
PERFECT TIMING.
THEY CAN FIGHT THESE FREAKIN' THINGS THEN...

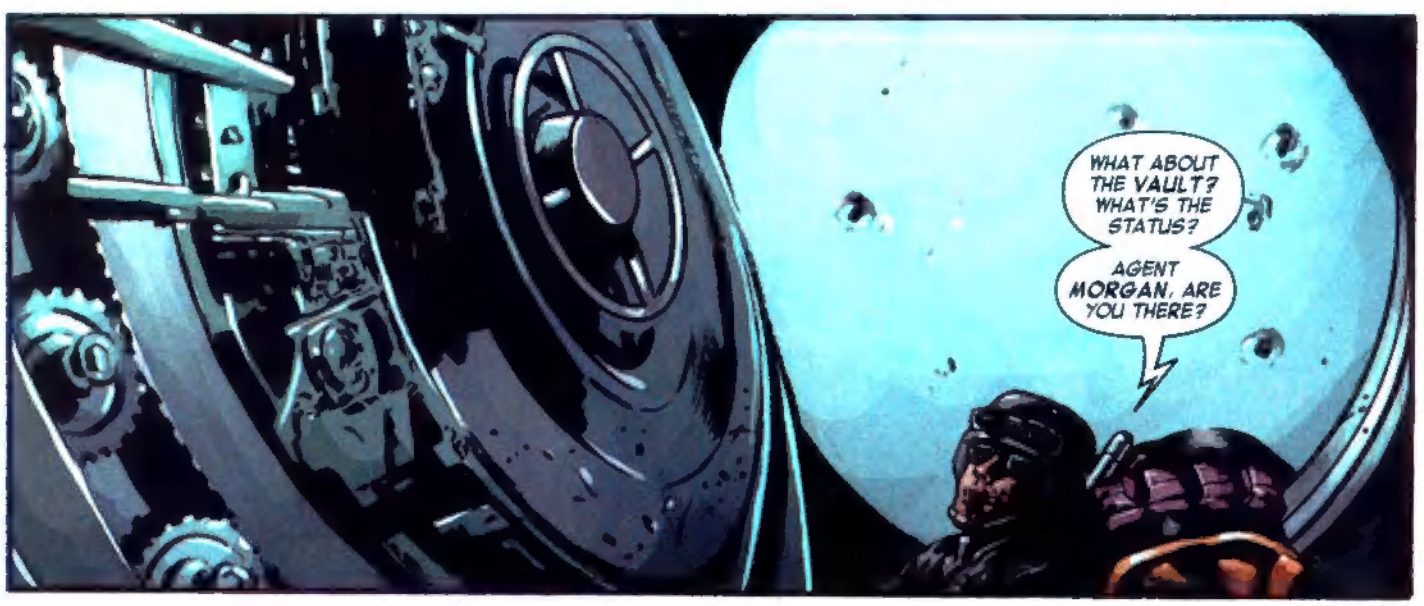
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
WE'LL HANDLE THIS! MORGAN, TAKE TWO MEN AND SECURE THAT VAULT!
AND WATCH YOUR BACK!
ON IT.
KA-BLAM
BLAM
UNH!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
NOT TODAY.

YOU KNOW, ALL THESE YEARS, YOU'VE NEVER TOLD ME HOW YOU DO THAT.
DODGE BULLETS.
WHAT?

OH, THAT'S NOTHING...I JUST SEE FASTER.

YOU SEE FASTER? AND THAT'S NOTHING...? I HAVE MENTIONED HOW INFURIATING YOU ARE, RIGHT?
JUST CHECKING.
SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY.


FIELD LEADER TO ALL TEAMS. UPDATE STATUS.
EAST WING CLEARED. ALL A.I.M. PERSONNEL IN CUSTODY.
EXTERIOR TUNNELS CLEARED, MA'AM. FIVE A.I.M. AGENTS IN CUSTODY.


WHAT ABOUT THE VAULT? WHAT'S THE STATUS?
AGENT MORGAN, ARE YOU THERE?

AGENT 13?
YES, AGENT COTTON, WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?
FIVE AGENTS WOUNDED, TWO K.I.A...

...AND ONE M.I.A.
MISSING?
YES MA'AM. ONE OF THE MEN WHO WAS WITH AGENT MORGAN.

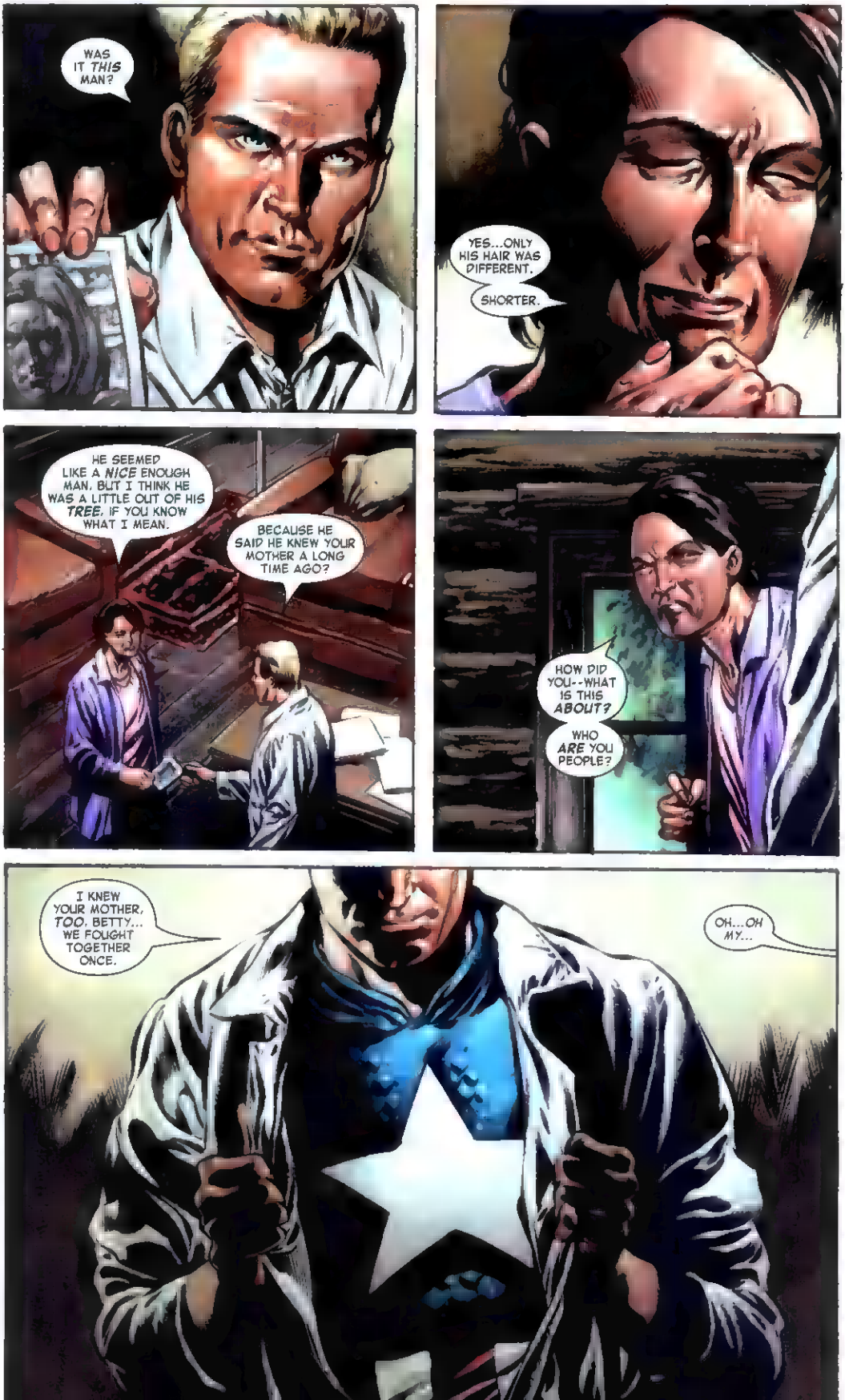
ALL RIGHT, PUT A CALL IN TO THE HELICARRIER, HAVE THEM ACTIVATE HIS GPS.
IF HE'S ALIVE, WE'LL FIND HIM.

YES, MA'AM, RIGHT AWAY.

THEY DON'T TAKE ANYTHING FROM THAT VAULT, BUT THEY KIDNAP ONE OF MY MEN...?
IT DOESN'T ADD UP.
NOTHING ABOUT THIS PLACE ADDS UP.

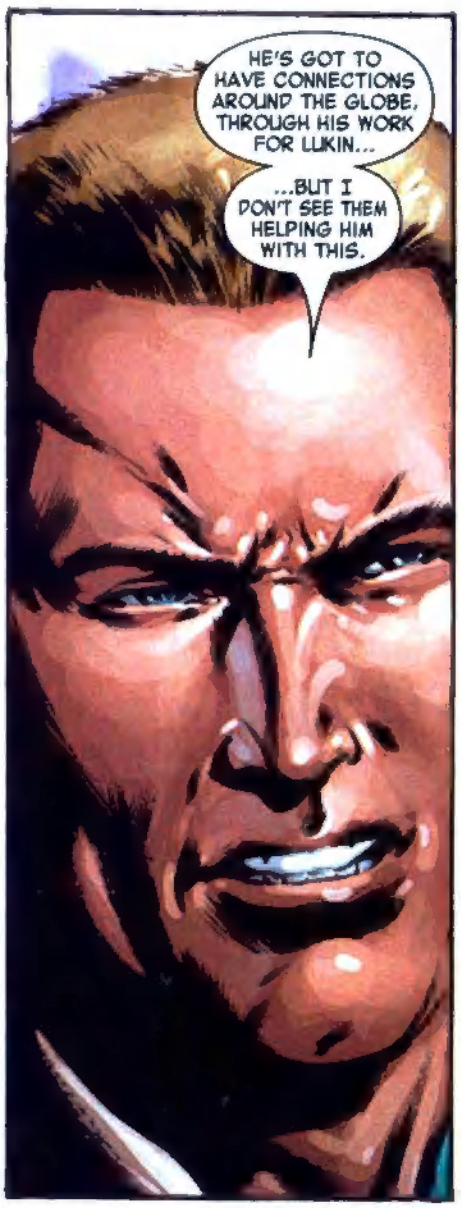
ACTUALLY, THERE'S ONE THING THAT DOES.
I THINK I KNOW WHY BUCKY WAS HERE.

A Few Hours Later...
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, MS. TOLIN...
PLEASE, CALL ME BETTY, EVERYONE DOES.
THEY TOLD US AT THE PILSBURG INN THAT YOU WERE THE DAUGHTER OF THE PREVIOUS OWNERS?
YES...MOM AND DAD RAN THE INN, A LONG TIME AGO.
YOUR MOTHER WAS GRETCHEN ZELLER, BEFORE SHE MARRIED YOUR FATHER?
AND SHE'S FROM GERMANY?
YES...
I'M SORRY--WHAT ■ THIS ABOUT?
WE'RE NOT THE ONLY PEOPLE TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MOTHER RECENTLY, ARE WE?
NO...THERE WAS SOMEONE, A LITTLE OVER A WEEK AGO.


WAS IT THIS MAN?
YES...ONLY HIS HAIR WAS DIFFERENT.
SHORTER.
HE SEEMED LIKE A NICE ENOUGH MAN. BUT I THINK HE WAS A LITTLE OUT OF HIS TREE, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
BECAUSE HE SAID HE KNEW YOUR MOTHER A LONG TIME AGO?
HOW DID YOU--WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?
WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?
I KNEW YOUR MOTHER, TOO, BETTY... WE FOUGHT TOGETHER ONCE.
OH...OH MY...

WHAT?
IT'S A LITTLE CONVENIENT, ISN'T IT?
BUCKY TRACKS DOWN THE GIRL HE USED TO LOVE, AND STUMBLES OVER AN A.I.M. CELL?

YEAH...AND HOW EXACTLY WOULD HE TRACK SOMEONE WHO IMMIGRATED TO THE U.S. IN THE LATE 40s AND CHANGED HER NAME?


HE'S GOT TO HAVE CONNECTIONS AROUND THE GLOBE, THROUGH HIS WORK FOR LUKIN...
...BUT I DON'T SEE THEM HELPING HIM WITH THIS.

SO WHAT, THEN?
SOMEONE STEERED HIM TO THIS TOWN... SOMEONE WHO KNEW WHAT IT WOULD MEAN TO HIM.
AND WHO'S THAT?

THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON IT COULD BE...FURY.

WHAT? NICK'S GONE UNDERGROUND, STEVE.
WE BOTH KNOW THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE'S SITTING ON HIS HANDS, WHEREVER HE IS.
AND IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES SENSE.
FURY SOMEHOW GETS WORD TO BUCK THAT HE'LL FIND HIS ANSWERS ABOUT GRETCHEN HERE...
...KNOWING THAT IF HE SPENT ANY TIME IN THE TOWN, HE'D REALIZE WHAT IT REALLY WAS.
IT MAY HAVE EVEN BEEN A TEST ON NICK'S PART.
THAT DOES SOUND LIKE NICK... WORKING ALL THE ANGLES.
SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK HE MEANT BY "BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE"?
I THINK HE'S GOING TO TRY TO KILL LUKIN FOR WHAT THEY DID TO HIM...
...AND I DON'T THINK HE PLANS TO SURVIVE THE ATTACK.

PLEASE... NO...NO MORE...
WENT TO A LOTTA TROUBLE TO GET OUR HANDS ON YOU, S.H.I.E.L.D. MAN...
NOW TELL US WHO KILLED THE RED SKULL.
DON'T KNOW WHO...PULLED THE TRIGGER...BUT...MAN WHO ORDERED IT... HEARD THEM TALK ABOUT HIM...
...RUNS A... CORPORATION... CALLED KRONAS.
HIS NAME IS...LUKIN.
SEE? WAS THAT SO HARD?
KRRAK
WHAT DO YOU SAY, GIRL?
I SAY WE FIND THIS LUKIN @&%# AND SHOW HIM A GOOD TIME... OUR WAY.

NEXT MONTH--THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BLITZ BEGINS!

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Lots of letters this month, and I could only run a few, but at least they are some good ones!

Before reading CAPTAIN AMERICA #15, I didn't know anything about Synthia Schmidt (I'm relatively new, having only been reading CAP on and off for about ten years). By the end of the issue I felt I knew everything there is to know about her, including the details of her relationship with her father, the Red Skull.

It's a testament to how good a writer Ed Brubaker is that a story that doesn't really feature the title's star was still one of the best comics I read this month. And let's not forget Mike Perkins and Frank D'Armata, who did a great job with the look of the book. I especially enjoyed the first few pages with the old footage of Cap shown from the camera's perspective.

Thanks for a great read.

John Turner
UK

Thanks, John, glad you noticed that effect in the opening scene. I think Mike really nailed that one.

After reading the various volumes of CAP and being disappointed by how he was being handled, I was wary of starting this new volume written by Mr. Brubaker. However, I have read a title he did for another company and liked both it and how he handled one of my favorite characters, so I decided to see how he would handle writing Cap. I am very glad I made that decision.

This version of CAPTAIN AMERICA is terrific. From the first issue to #16, which I just finished reading, everything has been beyond great. From the storylines in which he related to other characters, from Fury, to Lukin to Agent 13. Cap was made human again. This title is one of my top 5 that I look forward to each month and coming from a diehard X-fan, that says a lot.

Now, I'll admit to also being one of those "traditionalists" who firmly believed that in all of the Marvel, there were 3 people who should never be brought back: Gwen Stacy, Uncle Ben and of course, Bucky.

When the Winter Soldier arc began, I was a little uneasy. I've seen characters brought back to life with little to no explanation and I feared that this would be another one. That Bucky would just appear again with some silly reason or worse, a clone. Thankfully, Mr. Brubaker pulled off what no other writer could have done. You brought Bucky back in a way that was both well-written, emotional and believable. Your talent for writing these characters is amazing, and I look forward to the day you have Steve and Bucky meet. I hope you have plans for that meeting.

The only small thing I was slightly disappointed in was that it appears from #16 you cut Bucky's hair. I liked the longer hair. It was a better match for these modern days.

Please keep up the excellent work in both this title and your other ventures and I eagerly look forward to your work on UXM. I just hope being on too many titles will not cause Cap to suffer. He is the best he has been in at least a decade. Good work.

Tammy Suto
Rayland, Ohio

So Tammy, I won you over on Bucky, but not on the new haircut? Dang. Well, it's only hair, it can still grow. And don't worry, though you may not know it, I've been doing three to four comics a month for years now, so Cap will not suffer, I promise.

It seems like a lifetime ago now, maybe it is, but around 1985-7 I ran a small comic shop in Wolverhampton, England. As was done in those days (and these probably), we enlisted some part-time help from our diverse customer base. One of these guys was a scrawny 14-year-old called Michael Perkins who had just got into the American Comics scene and was a big fan of George Perez, as were most people at the time. He started doing his own strips, and by the time we parted ways a couple of years later, I'd taught him all I knew (I did the art on our shop ads) and he was determined to make a career of it.

Over the years I've spotted his work dotted around, most notably at 2000AD and CrossGen. I then noticed he was inking CAPTAIN AMERICA. I bragged to the family a bit on how he used to be and how I maybe helped him along a bit. I bragged even more after seeing his full art on issue #15. Good on yer, Mike. I've shown these comics to my 9-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter (who have shown the seeds of artistic greatness) to show what can be achieved if you put your mind to it; maybe if they don't make it as rock stars, they'll do what I sometimes wish I'd done, and make every effort to get along in this business.

P.S. I like the writing too!

Martin Forrest
Worcestershire, England

And I rushed to get your letter printed in an issue Mike actually drew, too!

These next two letters were ones we recently received that bring up some interesting points of debate, actually, so I'm running them one after the other, and will comment afterwards. I had to edit them a bit to run them, but I believe I left their main points intact.

I just finished reading #15. In the thirty years that I have enjoyed the hobby, I have never actually felt disgust and shame...until now.

I suffered through thousands killed by a weapon of mass destruction, scenes of Bucky being brutally beaten and tortured, A.I.M. thugs disgracefully shooting innocent people begging for help, and much more. But when you spent twenty-two pages depicting a large man striking a defenseless woman repeatedly with sexual undertone, and on the last page showing her enjoying it, that was going too far.

Impressionable boys in their teens and twenties just read a story by an acclaimed writer essentially telling them that if they abuse and rape women that...the women LIKE IT. You told it in a Captain America story with a logo that this book was voted best book of 2005. Marvel, Mr. Quesada, Mr. Brevoort and Mr. Brubaker, I hope you realize that because you printed this book, some poor girl, maybe many girls, will be abused. What type of world do you want to live in? It must not be the same world I want.

Rodney J. Boyce
(via e-mail)

I really enjoyed The Winter Solider, a fun story that also tried very hard not to offend fans who take the Bucky and Gwen Stacy rule super-seriously. Your crew's collective desire to act responsibly in that regard was clear, which made your total irresponsibility in issue #15 all the more shocking. This was one of the most offensive, unpleasant and really evil comics I've read in a long time--and that's saying something considering the amount of Miller and Ennis I've read.

Women getting kidnapped, terrified and tortured by men is not a topic that should be treated lightly, as you did, in any medium. In fact, nothing that horrible which happens on a daily basis IN THE UNITED STATES, let alone other parts of the world, should be treated as simple entertainment. And that's exactly what you did--you set out to entertain readers by showing them a woman being tortured, without trying to provide ANY sense of why this might be a bad thing.

You need to take the power of your medium and stories more seriously than you did with this issue. You need to write stories that do not encourage, let alone condone, violence against specific segments of the planet's population.

Daniel Braun
(via e-mail)

First, I'd like to point out that there's no rape anywhere in CAP #15, nor is it implied. And while I can understand that certain topics are highly sensitive to some people, I take strong exception to the idea that writing about evil people doing evil things is the same as condoning or encouraging them. The issue was meant to be a very grim look at Crossbones and a look at Synthia Schmidt's history, and I believe that's what it ended up as. At this point in time, I think it's very clear that torture is abhorrent, and I didn't believe I needed a character in the comic pointing that fact out. I thought Synthia's cries for help and for Crossbones to stop achieved that same thing, as did the overall horror of her situation. If a single person read issue #15 and walked away thinking torture was cool (and I sincerely doubt anyone did), then I'd wager they had quite a twisted view of reality long before they picked up our comic.

But as a writer, I don't believe any subject of fiction should be taboo. This is fiction, not reporting, and not editorializing. And we're not writing instruction manuals, we're telling stories, sometimes about the bad guys. I try to make the people in my work act the way their character and history says they should act, not how I'd like them to be in real life. Crossbones is a vicious and twisted guy, with a history of torturing people (ask any Diamondback fan). If Cap had been in the issue, I'm sure he'd have been disgusted and enraged at Crossbones' actions, but that wasn't the story. It was a story about an evil person forcing another evil person to find their way back to the dark side, basically. And it was about how Synthia Schmidt was essentially trapped by her own twisted past. I'm sorry if that subject matter was offensive to any of our readers, but it is hard to show evil people without them doing evil things.

All right, that's all we've got room for this month, but keep those emails and letters coming, and we'll be back soon with the first part of TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BLITZ, where, um, more evil people do more evil things, but this time there are good guys, too.

Ed Brubaker

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BLITZ!

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